

In relation to budget, Public Higher Education

Dr. Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur

I am writing to you today as Chair and Professor of Sociology at Rhode Island College and a member of the Executive Committee of the RIC/AFT Local 1819 to strongly advocate for an increase in funding for Rhode Island College.

Research clearly shows that funding public higher education is one of the best investments that states can make. Research tells us that people with a college degree are healthier, live longer, are more likely to be employed, earn more, and are more engaged in civic activities like votingⁱ. Thus, funding public higher education reduces the need for public expenditure in other areas and increases tax revenues. Funding public higher education is also a key engine for economic development, as an educated workforce draws employers to invest in a locality and is a central driver of business relocation decisionsⁱⁱ.

While all investments in public higher education are good investments, an investment in Rhode Island College is best of all. This is true for two main reasons. First, bachelor's degrees have a bigger payoff for both individuals and communities, and students who begin at four-year colleges are far more likely to earn a bachelor's degree. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Centerⁱⁱⁱ, less than a third of students who start at CCRI complete a degree at any institution, while among students who begin at a public four-year institution in Rhode Island, over 75% do. This is consistent with national data that shows that students who begin at community colleges are far less likely to earn degrees, even if they intend to transfer to a four-year college, than are students who begin at a four-year institutions. Students who complete a bachelor's degree earn, on average, about \$20,000 more per year than students who complete an associate's degree, and they are more likely to be employed as well^{iv}. Increasing the percentage of people in a region who have a four-year college degree raises average wages in the community, increases tax revenues, and improves health outcomes and civic participation^v.

Second, Rhode Island College students are more likely to stay in Rhode Island. Research shows that students who attend college in the same state in which they finished high school are far more likely to stick around after they complete their undergraduate degree than are students who leave their home state for high school^{vi}. At Rhode Island College, about 85% of our undergraduate students—and an even higher percentage of our graduate students—are Rhode Islanders. At the University of Rhode Island, in contract, only 53% of students are Rhode Islanders. Thus, an investment in Rhode Island College is an investment in people who will stay here and help built our future.

Rhode Island College has asked for \$58.1 million for FY 2022. This funding is necessary for the College to be able to provide the excellent education that will prepare Rhode Islanders to fill the jobs of tomorrow and to do the work of sustaining our communities. This funding would allow us to reverse some of the layoffs that have reduced our ability to serve our students well. It would ensure that the College could meet contractual commitments the State of Rhode Island entered into but which were never funded. It would ensure that we can invest in the technology and personnel necessary to support high-demand, high-wage academic programs like nursing and computer science. The federal COVID relief funds are designed to provide coverage for

mitigation and student financial aid, and Rhode Island College cannot use them to fund these vital priorities. Your investment will make the difference.

As a professor and a department chair I work with students every day who are shining examples of what a Rhode Island College education can do. Take the student who is graduating this spring after coming to college unsure of what her future path might hold and low in confidence about her academic abilities, a student who is the first in her family to earn a bachelor's degree, and who has already gotten a job offer well before graduation to work in a research position for a medical data informatics company. Take the student who nearly quit college but now is the director of programs for a local nonprofit while finishing her master's degree. Take the student who graduated shortly after having her first child and is now a human resources director, or the first generation student earning his Ph.D., or so many of your excellent colleagues in the legislature and other parts of government. Rhode Island College is the engine of opportunity for Rhode Islanders and for our state's future, and an investment in Rhode Island College is an investment in building stronger communities and a more robust economy for all of us.

I know the task before you is challenging as you seek to balance the many priorities that all merit investment. But I ask that you keep Rhode Island College's needs at the top of that list of priorities. I ask this because I know that your investment in our students is an investment that will pay off. It is an investment in tomorrow. It is the kind of investment our entire state can benefit from.

Thank you.

--Dr. Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur, mmmlarthur@gmail.com

i <https://www.collegetransitions.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/hout-returns-to-college-education.pdf>

ii <http://www.collaborativeri.org/research/how-higher-education-shapes-the-workforce>

iii <https://nscresearchcenter.org/tracking-transfer/>

iv <https://www.bls.gov/emp/chart-unemployment-earnings-education.htm>

v <http://www.collegetransitions.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/hout-returns-to-college-education.pdf>

vi <http://www.collaborativeri.org/research/how-higher-education-shapes-the-workforce>